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Op-ed / Transforming relationships with First Nations (08/01/18)

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following op-ed article was released today by Ed Doherty, Minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs. MEDIA CONTACT: Nichole Bowman, Aboriginal Affairs, 506-444-4194.

FREDERICTON (CNB) - With the beginning of a new year upon us, it is an ideal time to reflect on our accomplishments over the past 12 months. New Brunswick has embarked on a period of transformational change that will lead us to our common goal of self-sufficiency. To achieve this, we need all New Brunswickers working together.

When our government took office in October 2006, I was honoured when Premier Shawn Graham appointed me as the Minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs. I welcomed his confidence in me to create a more open dialogue and to transform the relationship with the First Nations communities of New Brunswick

We knew the relationship between the province and First Nations had not always been an easy one. The challenge before us was to find ways to move forward. We committed to a new era of co-operation, where this new chapter in the relationship would be based on respect, good faith and partnership.

To achieve our goal, the Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat was given a new mandate with a clear direction. Aboriginal Affairs became the gateway for contact between the province and First Nations. The secretariat played a lead role within the provincial government in addressing Aboriginal issues. It was imperative that, as a province, we found ways to address First Nation issues in a more co-ordinated manner than we had in the past.

At the federal level, the secretariat collaborated with several departments, particularly the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, among others, on various issues of importance to the First Nations.

The secretariat continued to act as the liaison with the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet communities and Aboriginal organizations to ensure the development of long-term positive relationships with the First Nations leaders. In addition, we ensured that the public service was educated and aware of Aboriginal issues and cultural differences, as well as stimulated awareness of the Aboriginal culture at a provincial level.

We wanted to develop a new government to government relationship with the First Nations communities, and were prepared to deepen our co-operation for the mutual advantage of the province.

The discussions concentrated on the positive aspects of the relationship and how the province and each individual First Nation worked together to improve the lives of Aboriginal New Brunswickers. The discussions also provided important opportunities to establish common goals and initiate strategies for achieving them.

The many issues that we worked on together, from strengthening the quality of our relationships to improving our level of co-operation, made a tangible difference. The discussions were the beginning of the next chapter in the relations

between our government and the First Nations.

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This hard work and dedication culminated on June 22, 2007, with the signing of the Mik'maq, Maliseet, Province of New Brunswick Relationship Building Bilateral Agreement.

The signing of this accord was a historic moment in transforming the relationship between our two levels of government and moving toward our goal of self-sufficiency.

It has been a productive and exciting year forging a new relationship with the First Nations communities. As Minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs, I look forward to building on this framework and continuing our progress in 2008.

08/01/18